

S P E E C H
OF
SENATOR DOUGLAS,
OF ILLINOIS,
ON THE
PACIFIC RAILROAD BILL.

DELIVERED IN THE SENATE OF THE UNITED STATES, APRIL 17, 1856.

The Senate having under consideration the bill to authorize the President of the United States to contract for the transportation of the mails, troops, seamen, munitions of war, and all other Government service, by railroad, from the Missouri river to San Francisco, in the State of California—Mr. DOUGLAS said:

Mr. PRESIDENT: I have witnessed with deep regret the indications that this measure is to be defeated at the present session of Congress. I had hoped that this Congress would signalize itself by inaugurating the great measure of connecting the Mississippi valley with the Pacific ocean by a railroad. I had supposed that the people of the United States had decided the question at the last presidential election in a manner so emphatic as to leave no doubt that their will was to be carried into effect. I believe that all the presidential candidates at the last election were committed to the measure. All the presidential platforms sanctioned it as a part of their creed. I believe it is about the only measure on which there was entire unanimity; and it is a very curious fact that the measure which commanded universal approbation—the measure upon which all parties united; a measure against which no man could be found, previous to the election, to raise his voice—should be the one that can receive no support, nor the coöperation of any one party, while disputed measures can occupy the whole time of Congress, and can be carried through successfully. I make no complaint of any political party, nor of any gentleman who opposes this bill; but it did strike me that it was a fact to be noticed, that a measure of this description, so long before the country, so well understood by the people, and receiving such universal sanction from them, should not be carried into effect. If the bill which has been devised by the committee is not the best that can be framed, let it be amended and modified until its objectionable features shall be removed. Let us not make a test question of this particular form of bill or that particular form; of this particular route or that particular route; of the benefits to this section or that section. If there is anything wrong in the details, in the form, in the construction of the bill, let the objectionable features be removed, and carry out the great object of a railroad communication between the Mississippi valley and the Pacific ocean.

Various objections have been raised to this bill, some referring to the route, involving sectional considerations; others to the form of the bill; others to the present time as inauspicious for the construction of such a railroad under any circumstances. Sir, I have examined this bill very carefully. I was a member

of the committee that framed it, and I gave my cordial assent to the report. I am free to say that I think it is the best bill that has ever been reported to the Senate of the United States for the construction of a Pacific railroad. I say this with entire disinterestedness, for I have heretofore reported several myself, and I believe I have invariably been a member of the committees that have reported such bills. I am glad to find that we have progressed to such an extent as to be able to improve on the former bills that have, from time to time, been brought before the Senate of the United States. This may not be perfect. It is difficult to make human legislation entirely perfect; at any rate, to so construct it as to bring about an entire unanimity of opinion upon a question that involves, to some extent, selfish, sectional, and partisan considerations. But, sir, I think this bill is fair. First, it is fair in the location of the route, as between the different sections. The termini are fixed. Then the route between the termini is to be left to the contractors and owners of the road, who are to put their capital into it, and, for weal or for woe, are to be responsible for its management.

What is the objection to these termini? San Francisco, upon the Pacific, is not only central, but it is the great commercial mart, the great concentrating point, the great entrepot for the commerce of the Pacific, not only in the present, but in the future. That point was selected as the western terminus, for the reason that there seemed to be a unanimous sentiment, that whatever might be the starting point on the east, the system would not be complete until it should reach the city of San Francisco on the west. I suggested myself, in the committee, the selection of that very point; not that I had any objection to other points; not that I was any more friendly to San Francisco and her inhabitants than to any other port on the Pacific; but because I believe that to be the commanding port, the large city where trade concentrates, and its position indicated it as the proper terminus on the Pacific ocean.

Then, in regard to the eastern terminus, a point on the Missouri river is selected, for various reasons. One is, that it is central as between the North and South—as nearly central as could be selected. It was necessary to commence on the Missouri river, if you were going to take a central route, in order that the starting point might connect with navigation, so that you might reach it by boats, in carrying your iron, your supplies, and your materials, for the commencement and the construction of the road. It was essential that you should commence at a point of navigation so that you could connect with the seaboard. If you start it at a point back in the interior five hundred or a thousand miles, as it is proposed, at El Paso, from the navigable waters of the Mississippi, it would cost you more money to carry the iron, provisions, supplies, and men to that starting point, than it would to make a road from the Mississippi to the starting point, in order to begin the work. In that case it would be a matter of economy to make a road to your starting point in order to begin. Hence, in my opinion, it would be an act of folly to think of starting a railroad to the Pacific at a point eight hundred or a thousand miles in the interior, away from any connection with navigable water, or with other railroads already in existence.

For these reasons we agreed in the bill to commence on the Missouri river. When you indicate that river, a little diversity of opinion arises as to what point on the river shall be selected. There are various respectable, thriving towns on either bank of the river, each of which thinks it is the exact position where the road ought to commence. I suppose that Kansas City, Wyandott, Weston, Leavenworth, Atchison, Platte's Mouth City, Omaha, De Soto, Sioux City, and various other towns whose names have not become familiar to us, and have found no resting place on the map, each thinks that it has the exact place where the road should begin. Well, sir, I do not desire to show any preference between these towns, either of them would suit me very well; and we leave it to the contractors to say which shall be the one. We leave the exact eastern terminus open, for the reason that the public interests will be substantially as well served by the selection of the one as the other. It is not so at the western terminus. San Francisco does not occupy that relation to the towns on the Pacific coast that those little towns on the Missouri river do to the country east

of the Missouri. The public have no material interest in the question whether it shall start at the mouth of the Kansas, at Weston, at Leavenworth, at St. Joseph, at Platte's Mouth, or at Sioux City. Either connects with the great lines; either would be substantially central as between North and South. So far as I am concerned, I should not care a sixpence which of those towns was selected as the starting point, because, they start there upon a plain that stretches for eight hundred miles, and can connect with the whole railroad system of the country. You can go directly west. You can bend to the north and connect with the northern roads, or bend to the south and connect with the southern roads.

The Senator from Georgia (Mr. IVERSON) would be satisfied, as I understand, with the termini, if we had selected one intermediate point, so as to indicate the route that should be taken between the termini. I understand that he would be satisfied if we should indicate that it should go south of Santa Fé, so as to include as the probable line the Albuquerque route, or the one on the thirty-fifth parallel, or the one south of it. Sir, I am free to say that, individually, I should have no objection to the route indicated by the Senator from Georgia. I have great faith that the Albuquerque route is an exceedingly favorable one; favorable in its grades, in the shortness of its distances, in its climate, the absence of deep snow, and in the topography of the country. While it avoids very steep grades, it furnishes, perhaps, as much of grass, of timber, of water, of materials necessary for the construction and repair of the road, if not more than any other route. As a Northern man, living upon the great line of the lakes, you cannot indicate a route that I think would subserve our interests, and the great interests of this country, better than that; yet, if I expressed the opinion that the line ought to go on that route between the termini, some other man would say it ought to go on Governor Steven's extreme northern route; some one else would say it ought to go on the South Pass route; and we should divide the friends of the measure as to the point at which the road should pass the mountains—whether at the extreme north, at the center, the Albuquerque route, or the further southern one down in Arizona—and we should be unable to decide between ourselves which was best.

I have sometimes thought that the extreme northern route, known as the Stevens' route, was the best, as furnishing better grass, more timber, more water, more of those elements necessary in constructing, repairing, operating, and maintaining a road, than any other. I think now that the preference, merely upon routes, is between the northern or Stevens' route on the one side, and the Albuquerque route on the other. Still, as I never expect to put a dollar of money into the road, as I never expect to have any agency or connection with or interest in it, I am willing to leave the selection of the route between the termini to those who are to put their fortunes, and connect their character, with the road, and to be responsible, in the most tender of all points, if they make a mistake in the selection. But for these considerations, I should have cheerfully yielded to the suggestion of the Senator from Georgia, to fix the crossing point on the Rio Grande river.

But, sir, I am unwilling to lose this great measure merely because of a difference of opinion as to what shall be the pass selected in the Rocky Mountains through which the road shall run. I believe it is a great national measure, I believe it is the greatest practical measure now pending before the country. I believe that we have arrived at that period in our history when our great substantial interests require it. The interests of commerce, the great interests of travel and communication—those still greater interests that bind the Union together, and are to make and preserve the continent as one and indivisible—all demand that this road shall be commenced, prosecuted, and completed, at the earliest practicable moment.

I am unwilling to postpone the bill until next December. I have seen these postponements from session to session, for the last eight or ten years, with the confident assurance every year that at the next session we should have abundance of time to take up the bill and act upon it. Sir, will you be better prepared at the next session than now? We have now the whole summer before us, draw-

ing our pay, and proposing to perform no service. Next December, you will have but ninety days, with all the unfinished business left over, your appropriation bills on hand, and not only the regular bills, but the new deficiency bill; and you will postpone this measure again, for the want of time to consider it then. I think, sir, we had better grapple with the difficulties that surround this question now, when it is fairly before us, when we have time to consider it, and when I think we can act upon it as dispassionately, as calmly, as wisely, as we shall ever be able to do.

I have regretted to see the question of sectional advantages brought into this discussion. If you are to have but one road, fairness and justice would plainly indicate that that one should be located as near the center as practicable. The Missouri river is as near the center and the line of this road is as near as it can be made; and if there is but one to be made, the route now indicated, in my opinion, is fair, is just, and ought to be taken. I have heretofore been of the opinion that we ought to have three roads: one in the centre, one in the extreme south, and one in the extreme north. If I thought we could carry the three, and could execute them in any reasonable time, I would now adhere to that policy and prefer it; but I have seen enough here during this session of Congress to satisfy me that but one can pass, and to ask for three at this time is to lose the whole. Believing that that is the temper, that that is the feeling, and, I will say, the judgment, of the members of both Houses of Congress, I prefer to take one road rather than to lose all in the vain attempt to get three. If there were to be three, of course the one indicated in this bill would be the central; one would be north of it, and another south of it. But if there is to be but one, the central one should be taken; for the north, by bending a little down south, can join it, and the south, by leaning a little to the north, can unite with it too; and our Southern friends ought to be able to bend and lean a little, as well as to require us to bend and lean all the time, in order to join them. The central position is the just one, if there is to be but one road. The concession should be as much on the one side as on the other. I am ready to meet gentlemen half way on every question that does not violate principle, and they ought not to ask us to meet them more than half way where there is no principle involved and nothing but expediency.

Then, sir, why not unite upon this bill? We are told it is going to involve the Government of the United States in countless millions of expenditure. How is that? Certainly not under this bill, not by authority of this bill, not without violating this bill. The bill under consideration provides that when a section of the road shall be made, the Government may advance a portion of the lands, and \$12,500 per mile in bonds on the section thus made, in order to aid in the construction of the next, holding a lien upon the road for the refunding of the money thus advanced. Under this bill it is not possible that the contractors can ever obtain more than \$12,500 per mile on each mile of the road that is completed. It is, therefore, very easy to compute the cost to the Government. Take the length of the road in miles, and multiply it by \$12,500, and you have the cost. If you make the computation, you will find it will come to a fraction over twenty million dollars. The limitation in the bill is, that in no event shall it exceed \$25,000,000. Therefore, by the terms of the bill, the undertaking of the Government is confined to \$25,000,000; and, by the calculation, it will be less than that sum. Is that a sum that would bankrupt the Treasury of the United States?

I predict to you now, sir, that the Mormon campaign has cost, and has led to engagements and undertakings that, when redeemed, will cost more than twenty-five million dollars, if not double that sum. During the last six months, on account of the Mormon rebellion, expenses have been paid, and undertakings have been assumed, which will cost this Government more than the total expenditure which can possibly be made in conformity with the provisions of this bill. If you had had this railroad made you would have saved the whole cost which the Government is to advance in this little Mormon war alone. If you have a general Indian war in the mountains, it will cost you twice the amount called for by this bill. If you should have a war with a European

Power, the construction of this road would save many fold its cost in the transportation of troops and munitions of war to the Pacific ocean, in carrying on your operations.

In an economical point of view, I look upon it as a wise measure. It is one of economy as a war measure alone, or as a peace measure for the purpose of preventing a war. Whether viewed as a war measure, to enable you to check rebellion in a territory, or hostilities with the Indians, or to carry on vigorously a war with a European Power, or viewed as a peace measure, it is a wise policy, dictated by every consideration of public convenience and public good.

Again, sir, in carrying the mails, it is an economical measure. As the Senator from Georgia has demonstrated, the cost of carrying the mails alone to the Pacific ocean for thirty years, under the present contracts, is double the amount of the whole expenditure under this bill for the same time in the construction and working of the road. In the transportation of mails, then, it would save twice its cost. The transportation of army and navy supplies would swell the amount three or four-fold. How many years will it be before the Government will receive back, in transportation, the whole cost of this advance of aid in the construction of the road?

But, sir, some gentlemen think it is an unsound policy, leading to the doctrine of internal improvements by the Federal Government within the different States of the Union. We are told we must confine the road to the limits of the Territories, and not extend it into the States, because it is supposed that entering a State with this contract violates some great principle of State-rights. Mr. President, the committee considered that proposition, and they avoided that objection, in the estimation of the most strict, rigid, tight-laced State-rights men that we have in the body. We struck out the provision in the bill first drawn, that the President should contract for the construction of a railroad from the Missouri river to the Pacific ocean; and followed an example that we found on the statute-book, for carrying the mails from Alexandria to Richmond, Virginia—an act passed about the time when the resolutions of 1798 were adopted, and the report of 1799 was made—an act that we thought came exactly within the spirit of those resolutions. That act, according to my recollection, was, that the Department be authorized to contract for the transportation of the United States mail by four-horse post-coaches, with closed backs, so as to protect it from the weather and rain, from Alexandria to Richmond, in the State of Virginia. It occurred to this committee that if it had been the custom, from the beginning of this Government to this day, to make contracts for the transportation of the mails in four-horse post-coaches, built in a particular manner, and the contractor left to furnish his own coaches and his own horses, and his own means of transportation, we might make a similar contract for the transportation of the mails by railroad from one point to another, leaving the contractor to make his own railroad, and furnish his own cars, and comply with the terms of the contract.

There is nothing in this bill that violates any one principle which has prevailed in every mail contract that has been made, from the days of Dr. Franklin down to the elevation of James Buchanan to the Presidency. Every contract for carrying the mail by horse, from such a point to such a point, in saddle-bags, involves the same principle. Every contract for carrying it from such a point to such a point in two-horse hacks, with a covering to protect it from the storm, involves the same principle. Every contract to carry it from such a point to such a point in four-horse coaches of a particular description, involves the same principle. You contracted to carry the mails from New York to Liverpool in ships of two thousand tons each, to be constructed according to a model prescribed by the Navy Department, leaving the contractor to furnish his own ships, and receive so much pay. That involves the same principle.

You have, therefore, carried out the principle of this bill in every contract you have ever had for mails, whether it be upon the land or upon the water. In every mail contract you have had, you have carried out the identical principle involved in this bill—simply the right to contract for the transportation of the United States mails, troops, munitions of war, army and navy supplies, at

fair prices, in the manner you prescribed, leaving the contracting party to furnish the mode and means of transportation. That is all there is in it. I do not see how it can violate any party creed; how it can violate any principle of State-rights; how it can interfere with any man's conscientious scruples. Then, sir, where is the objection?

If you look on this as a measure of economy and a commercial measure, the argument is all in favor of the bill. It is true, the Senator from Massachusetts has suggested that it is idle to suppose that the trade of China is to center in San Francisco, and then pay sixty dollars a ton for transportation across the continent by a railroad to Boston. It was very natural that he should indicate Boston, as my friend from Georgia might, perhaps, have thought of Savannah, or my friend from South Carolina might have indicated Charleston, or the Senator from Louisiana might have indicated New Orleans. But I, living at the head of the great lakes, would have made the computation from Chicago, and my friend from Missouri would have thought it would have been very well, perhaps, to take it from St. Louis. When you are making this computation, I respectfully submit you must make the calculation from the sea-board to the center of the continent, and not charge transportation all the way from the Atlantic to the Pacific; for suppose you do not construct this road, and these goods come by ship to Boston, it will cost something to take them by railroad to Chicago, and a little more to take them by railroad to the Missouri river, half-way back to San Francisco again. If you select the center of the continent, the great heart and center of the Republic—the Mississippi valley—as the point at which you are to concentrate your trade, and from which it is to diverge, you will find that the transportation to it by railroad would not be much greater from San Francisco than from Boston. It would be nearly the same from the Pacific that it is from the Atlantic; and the calculation must be made in that point of view. There is the center of consumption, and the center of those great products that are sent abroad in all quarters to pay for articles imported. The center of production, the center of consumption, the future center of the population of the continent, is the point to which, and from which, your calculation should be made.

Then, sir, if it costs sixty dollars per ton for transportation from San Francisco to Boston by railroad, half-way you may say it will cost thirty dollars a ton. The result, then, of coming from San Francisco to the center by railroad, would be to save transportation by ship from San Francisco to Boston, in addition to the railroad transportation into the interior.

But, sir, I dissent from a portion of the gentleman's argument, so far as it relates to transportation even from San Francisco to Boston. I admit that heavy articles of cheap value and great bulk, would go by ship, that being the cheapest mode of communication; but light articles, costly articles, expensive articles, those demanded immediately, and subject to decay from long voyages and delays, would come directly across by railroad, and what you would save in time would be more than the extra expense of the transportation. You must add to that the risk of the tropics, which destroys many articles, and that process which is necessary to be gone through with to prepare articles for the sea-voyage, is to be taken into the account. I have had occasion to witness that evil in one article of beverage very familiar to you all. Let any man take one cup of tea that came from China to Russia overland, without passing twice under the equator, and he will never be reconciled to a cup of tea that has passed under the equator. The genuine article, that has not been manipulated and prepared to pass under the equator, is worth tenfold more than that which we receive here. Preparation is necessary to enable it to pass the tropics, and the long, damp voyage makes as much difference in the article of tea as the difference between a green apple and a dried apple, green corn and dried corn, sent abroad. So you will find it to be with fruits; so it will be with all the expensive and precious articles, and especially those liable to decay and to injury, either by exposure to a tropical climate, or to the moisture of a long sea-voyage.

Then, sir, in a commercial point of view, this road will be of vast importance. There is another consideration that I will allude to for a moment. It will extend our trade more than any other measure that you can devise, certainly more

than any one that you now have in contemplation. The people are all anxious for the annexation of Cuba so soon as it can be obtained on fair and honorable terms—and why? In order to get the small, pitiful trade of that Island. We all talk about the great importance of Central America, in order to extend our commerce; it is valuable to the extent it goes. But Cuba, Central America, and all the islands surrounding them, put together, are not a thousandth part of the value of the great East India trade that would be drawn first to our western coast, and then across to the valley of the Mississippi, if this railroad be constructed. Sir, if we intend to extend our commerce; if we intend to make the great ports of the world tributary to our wealth, we must prosecute our trade eastward or westward, as you please; we must penetrate the Pacific, its islands, and its continent, where the great mass of the human family reside—where the articles that have built up the powerful nations of the world have always come from. That is the direction in which we should look for the expansion of our commerce and of our trade. That is the direction our public policy should take—a direction that is facilitated by the great work now proposed to be made.

I care not whether you look at it in a commercial point of view, as a matter of administrative economy at home, as a question of military defense, or in reference to the building up of the national wealth, and power, and glory; it is the great measure of the age—a measure, that in my opinion has been postponed too long—and I frankly confess to you, that I regard the postponement to next December to mean, till after the next presidential election. No man hopes or expects, when you have not time to pass it in the early spring, at the long session, that you are going to consider it at the short session. When you come here at the next session, the objection will be that you must not bring forward a measure of this magnitude, because it will affect the political relations of parties, and it will be postponed then, as it was two years ago, to give the glory to the incoming Administration, each party probably thinking that it would have the honor of carrying out the measure. Hence, sir, I regard the proposition of postponement till December, to mean till after the election of 1860.

I desire to see all the pledges made in the last contest redeemed during this term, and let the next President, and the parties under him, redeem the pledges and obligations assumed during the next campaign. The people of all parties at the last presidential election decreed that this road was to be made. The question is now before us. We have time to consider it. We have all the means necessary, as much now as we can have at any other time. The Senator from Massachusetts intimates that the treasury being bankrupt now, we cannot afford the money. That Senator also remarked that we were just emerging from a severe commercial crisis—a great commercial revulsion—which had carried bankruptcy in its train. If we have just emerged from it, if we have passed it, this is the very time of all others when a great enterprise should be begun. It might have been argued when we saw that crisis coming, before it reached us, that we should furl our sails and trim our ship for the approaching storm; but when it has exhausted its rage, when all the mischief has been done that could be inflicted, when the bright sun of day is breaking forth, when the sea is becoming calm, and there is but little visible of the past tempest, when the nausea of sea-sickness is succeeded by joyous exhilaration, inspired by the hope of a fair voyage, let men feel elated and be ready to commence a great work like this, so as to complete it before another commercial crisis or revulsion shall come upon us.

Sir, if you pass this bill no money can be expended under it until one section of the road has been made. The surveys must be completed, the route must be located, the land set aside and surveyed, and a section of the road made, before a dollar can be drawn from the treasury. If you pass the bill now, it cannot make any drain on the treasury for at least two years to come; and who doubts that all the effects of the late crisis will have passed away before the expiration of those two years.

Mr. President, this is the auspicious time, either with a view to the interests of the country, or to that stagnation which exists between political parties,

which is calculated to make it a measure of the country rather than a partisan measure, or to the commercial and monetary affairs of the nation, or with reference to the future. Look upon it in any point of view, now is the time; and I am glad that the Senator from Louisiana has indicated, as I am told he has, that the motion for postponement is a test question; for I confess I shall regard it as a test vote on a Pacific railroad during this term, whatever it may be in the future. I hope that we shall pass the bill now.